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ABSTRACT

The rationale behind a new teacher induction program is that the primary personnel objective of any organization is to attract the most qualified personnel and move them, as quickly as possible, toward performance competence and personal satisfaction within their professional assignment. This transition is particularly important for new teachers, as they frequently know little about the school districts to which they have applied for work. Programmatic teacher induction is an attempt to increase the probability of a successful transition from training to employment. Unfortunately, many of the existing programs do not train prospective teachers adequately for the experiences they will encounter on their first assignment. The structure of any successful induction program should be guided by the assumption of dramatic gaps and differences in the training, experiences, and levels of competence of inexperienced first-year teachers. The content of such programs should be multi-dimensional and should cover instructional and managerial needs, evaluation procedures of the school district, and curricular objectives. The most important aspect of such programs should be the attention paid to teacher motivation and support to help the new teachers adjust to and succeed in their work environment. (CB)

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PROGRAMMATIC TEACHER INDUCTION:

A MODEL FOR NEW TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction/Rationale

Prepared for the Richardson Independent School District

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PROGRAMMATIC TEACHER INDUCTION:

A MODEL FOR NEW TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The primary personnel objective of any organization is to attract the most qualified people and move them, as quickly as possible, toward performance competence and personal satisfaction within their professional assignment. The sooner this goal is accomplished, the more competently the organization is perceived. The more qualified, i.e. proven, the employee at the time of employment, the less time is required for the demonstration of professional competence and, logically, the arrival of professional satisfaction.

Successful organizations make serious commitments to employee development. There are, for example, airline training schools that function independent of any individual airline that promise to train prospective airline employees and assist students in finding employment. Yet, when the airlines hire these trainees, their first assignment is to a training program that simulates the "real world" environment of <u>their</u> organization. The closest teacher education comes to this simulation is when a student teacher is hired to teach in the same building, with the same children, teaching the same subject, with the same colleagues, as their student teaching assignment. Most practitioners will tell you this "arrangement" works quite well for both the student teacher/teacher and the school district.

Problems present themselves when student teachers apply to school districts they know little about. The transition is rarely smooth and the consequences can be costly for both the new teacher and the school district. Programmatic teacher induction is an attempt to increase the probability of a successful transition from training to employment.

Teacher induction references that phase of professional development commencing with a programmatic commitment to teacher education and concluding with the convergence of demonstrated professional competence and professional satisfaction. The beginning of the process is in teacher education institutions and the finale is in the public school district. The goals, structure, and personnel differences between these two systems have been well documented. Attempts to reduce the differences, in an effort to produce a higher quality entry level professional, are legion. They include core programs within liberal arts and science degree plans, extended and intensive field-based programs, public school-based university methods programs, attracting and requiring grade level teaching experience as a prerequisite for university employment, public school staff developments and inse vices, student teacher placement and supervision with experienced competent professional educators. The list is endless. Each experience ends with the same result: Many first year teachers feel they have been trained for the experiences they will encounter on their first assignment.

Prospective teachers exit programs that have little in common beyond an occasional reference to planning, instruction, management, and evaluation. The professors rarely address the same objectives, even within the same course at the same university. The students don't see the same teachers. They don't work with or see the same students. They aren't expected to do the same things. They aren't evaluated the same way. Different criteria are often used. They don't teach the same subjects, with the same materials, in the same buildings.

Practicing personnel directors may pay little attention to the university supervisor's evaluations, and probably with good reason. The combined outside reference speaks to the student's traits or qualities in settings unlike the classroom, but say little about the student's capacity

to produce achievement gains. The only reference of any consequence is the student teacher supervisor's comments, which have long been known to be spuriously high regardless of actual performance.

Prospective teachers enter public school systems that have some similarity with each other but have nothing in common with universities. The school years are roughly the same length. Vacations often coincide. But it is with student differences that the "rubber meets the road." A teacher trained in a small college setting, student teaching in a small district, in small classes, in a small town where everybody knows everybody, might as well be going to Venus when they receive a first year placement, as a roving teacher, within their minor field, at a different grade level, in a different part of the state in a larger district. The school district believes the new teachers have the ability to adapt to the new situations. The university believes that the students are trained to adapt to new situations. The one person who knows the real truth about the gap between what they know and what they need to know is the new teacher, lying in bed the night before their first class, on their first day. They suddenly recognize the vastness of the gap. The consequences of this perception and reality are well-documented and dramatic.

The professional cost of being seduced by the assumption of similarity or adaptation is dramatic. New faculty within the same building, and basically the same student population, may interact with and evaluate students in dramatically different ways. Essential curricular expectations may not be met. Perhaps most importantly, the inability to adapt may affect the pace and quality of professional growth. The most serious public consequence of this random development are in student achievement and parental awareness that their child is being taught by "someone new, who has something to learn." The inexperienced teacher may eventually acquire the skills and confidence of

an experienced professional, but in the meantime, hundreds of students have learned less than they could have, in rooms led by teachers that could have been professionally competent sooner, and could have experienced the perception of professional success earlier in their development. Who has to take responsibility?

The primary responsibility for a new teacher induction program has to be with the employer. The school district is the only organization that can realistically prepare and supervise its employees itself. Naturally, the knowledge base of teacher development, instructional supervision, new teacher needs, expectations and performance, et cetera, should be attended to in the design of any induction program. No less important, and probably more critical, is the insight that can be offered by practicing district personnel and classroom teachers.

The structure of any induction program should be guided by the assumption of dramatic gaps and differences in the training, experiences, and levels of competence of inexperienced first year teachers. The assumption of similarity is simply too great and too suspicious an assumption to effectively meet the curricular, managerial, instructional, structural, and professional expectations of independent school districts. A more realistic tact would be the assumption of differences resolved by a commitment to programmatic induction for credentialed but inexperienced new teachers.

The content of new teacher induction programs should be multi-dimensional. Of primary concern should be the managerial and instructional needs of the new teacher as identified in some form of entry needs survey. The evaluative criteria of the district should be clearly and directly communicated before instruction begins to new teachers by those administrators who will be supervising instruction. Curricular expectations

and resources should be made clear and available beginning with the moment of employment. The district structure and organization warrants attention as do the professional opportunities and organizations within the district.

The least attended to, but perhaps most important, dimension of the induction program should be motivational. New teachers are different. They are new. They have not been hardened by experience or time. They are hopeful, believe they can make a difference, and believe they have begun a career in the noblest of professions. A special luncheon, a deliberate address by the superintendent, tailored inservices, and motivational talks from the most excellent and enthusiastic of the current teaching staff cannot help but sustain new teacher enthusiasm. They will be touched by the cynics soon enough. These teachers are often the first to discourage a new teacher that is full of hope and enthusiasm. If an early disappointment is not cushioned by an enthusiastic, positive model, the end result may be a career of cynicism.

There are those practitioners and teacher educators who will charge that programmatic and new teacher induction programs may threaten the artisan instincts. They will argue that deliberate inquiry into new teacher needs and deficiencies, complemented by appropriate staff developments and close supervision of performance is an insult to young professionals. At the heart of the beginner is either the confidence that comes from the triumph of naivete over experience or the insecurity that comes from a dramatic realization that certified preparation, however well-intentioned, has fallen short of generating the necessary confidence for minimal performance. Programmatic attention to teacher induction, in a climate of clear expectations and supervisory support, will increase the probability of accelerated, directional professional development. When personal and professional needs are met in the workplace, the artisan flourishes.